

ECCO

January 2014



If you have any suggestions or comments for ECCO, then please send them to Janet at ecco@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com.

The next ECCO will come out in March 2014



2015/16 Season Planning

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Chair's Welcome

Dear members,

I'd like to give a huge thank you to everyone who helped make Jack and the Beanstalk a success: the actors, the crew, the helpers and above all, the audience! Over 1,300 people came to see the show, including over 500 children – for some of whom, this will have been their first experience of live theatre.

We still have lots to look forward to this season with *An Ideal Husband* and *Miss Julie*, and will be planning our 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 seasons in January. If you would like to have an input on that planning – be it as a potential director, seasoned audience member or newcomer to the ECC - please do get in touch with me at the email address below.

Finally, I would like to wish you and yours all the best for the 2014!

Conrad Toft
ECC Chairman chair@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com



Tickets
NOW
Available
from
Bozar.be!

(click on image left to go to the website)

An Ideal Husband

By Oscar Wilde

The Studio Theatre, Palais des Beaux-Arts
19-23 March 2014

Director, Deborah Griffith, writes: An Ideal Husband was written by Oscar Wilde in 1895. The play takes place in London over a period of 24 hours and revolves around blackmail and political corruption. The themes of private and public honour and the need to be forgiven for past sins may well have been influenced by the situation Oscar Wilde was faced with during the early 1890's. At this time his own affair was still a secret and his fears of discovery may well have influenced him to write a play on the irrationality of ruining lives of great value to society because of people's hypocritical reactions to their sins and past mistakes.

This play has often been criticised for being sexist. Near the end of the play Lord Goring advises the rather judgemental Gertrude Chiltern that "A man's life is of more value than a woman's." The idea is put forward that women should be more forgiving of their husband's mistakes because of the complexity of their lives and the balance that they need to keep between their domestic and worldly obligations. Personally I don't see this as a sexist play, but one that sits in its time and expresses the commonly held opinions of the era in which it was written. The female characters are all very independent, strong willed, and they certainly drive the action of the play more than the men. Gertrude Chiltern is actively involved in politics; Mabel Chiltern displays a solid sense of self confidence; and Mrs. Cheveley is a woman who can certainly take care of herself. An Ideal Husband also touches on one of Wilde's consistent themes, the portrayal of the upper class in England as being hypocritical and obsessed with observing silly rules. This we see portrayed by the "pretty ladies" Lady Basildon and Mrs. Marchmont, and also Lady Markby, who brings Mrs. Cheveley into the Chilterns' home. All three of these characters are absurdly two-faced with great comic effect. Mrs. Cheveley, on the other hand is very sardonic in particular about the rules of society. Having broken most of them she sees ethics merely as obedience. At one point she states "I have a distinct recollection of Lady Chiltern always getting the good conduct prize" but then goes on to say that any prizes she may have won herself were certainly not for good conduct.

This version of the play will be set in the early 1950's. We tend to associate the 1950's with a time of regrowth and optimism, but that is really the story of the United States. In Europe there was still a sense of uncertainty. Rebuilding was needed not only of buildings and infrastructure, but also of confidence and identity. This was a time when Europe needed good leaders and Robert Chiltern is certainly portrayed as a man of high morals and integrity who is enjoying a highly successful political career; until Mrs. Cheveley arrives to try and destroy it. Whilst this play has all the classic wit and humour of Oscar Wilde, it also carries with it a serious message, and one that rings very true today in the early 21st Century.

Together with *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *An Ideal Husband* is often considered Wilde's dramatic masterpiece. After *Earnest* it is his most popularly produced play. I have nonetheless been impudent enough to cut the play somewhat and to modernise it where necessary to bring it into the mid-20th Century.

The cast is as follows:

Lord Robert Chiltern	Conrad Toft
Lady Chiltern	Martina Meyer
Lord Goring	Mark Prescott
Mrs. Cheveley	Abi Greef
Mabel Chiltern	Nicole Freund
Lady Markby	Boff Muir
Lord Caversham	Charles White
Lady Basildon	Ailsa Higgins
Mrs. Marchmont	Sara Hammerton

For our crew we are still missing somebody to run sound. This would be ideal for a beginner, as the sound will be very simple. If you are interested, please contact me via the ECC Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/ECCBrussels?ref=hl>

Many Congratulations
to all involved in Jack & The Beanstalk
A wonderful time was had by cast, crew and audience!





ECC NEWS

Miss Julie

by August Strindberg

The Warehouse Studio Theatre
10-14 June 2014



Director, Anna Holmen, writes: *Miss Julie* is probably Sweden's best-known play. This 90 minute play is set in a manor house, and the plot is built around the tensions that arise when the count's daughter visits the servants in the kitchen on a midsummer's evening.

Anna is delighted that she now has her cast: Sophie Thompson, Yorgos Filippakis and Lisa Ní Laoire. More in the March Ecco!

	Role	Contact us at:
Conrad Toft	Chair	chair@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Janet Middleton	Secretary & Ecco	ecco@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
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Lyn Wainwright	CAST	lyn@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Sara Hammerton	Publicity	sara@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com

Please do not hesitate to contact any one of us if you have a question or suggestion to make.

2015/16 SEASON - PLANNING NOW!

Directors – if you have a play you wish us to consider, now is the time to speak up! We will be discussing forward planning into 2015-16 at our meeting on 20 January 2014, and would love you to come and talk to us about your ideas. Please email Conrad to tell us more about your idea! chair@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com

GMAIL

I have had it drawn to my attention that with the new Gmail tabs Ecco and Ecco Flash now get delivered into the 'Promotions' box. To ensure that messages from us get sent directly into your 'Inbox' simply click and drag our email across from 'Promotions' into the 'Inbox', and thereafter our mailings to you should always be treated as regular mail. Janet

Wedding Congratulations!

Abi & Ingemar



Rachel Cuff writes: On November 1st, the Hospitium in the Museum Gardens of York was the setting for a romantic scene. The lighting was perfect, the costumes resplendent. The audience included several well-known faces from the Brussels am-dram scene and up on stage were two more, but this wasn't theatre, this was ... Real Life. Abi Greef and Ingemar Mikander were getting married.

It was a wonderful day – eating, drinking, singing, dancing, crying (in a good way) and laughing. The venue was stunning, the food – a marriage of Swedish, Yorkshire and Belgian tastes – fantastic, and the wine and schnapps free-flowing. At least, I think I remember that it was. Introducing the Swedish tradition of an “open mike” during the meal had apparently caused the groom some concern. Would the non-Swedes get the idea? Would they say anything? Would there be an embarrassing silence? Apparently Ingemar had forgotten that he had invited a roomful of thespians. There were poems, songs, speeches and Shakespeare – a really lovely alternative to the traditional UK wedding speeches.

The bride looked beautiful in ... red. Very appropriate (not only because she looked fabulous), because Abi and Ingo met while rehearsing the Red Death. A number of guests also appeared in that production, and there was rivalry as to who was responsible for the match, but let's credit Poppy Bullock for first encouraging Ingemar to audition. And the rest, as they say, is history. And now it's the future too: we wish them a lifetime of happiness together. So, this Christmas, raise a glass: To Abi and Ingo!



Laura & Jonathan

Laura Smith married Jonathan Nwagbaraocha in 2 ceremonies in October and November this year. The first was in Edinburgh at the end of Princes Street with all of Laura's family and Jonathan's parents and twin brother present. There was a ceilidh but luckily no one was injured by spinning men in kilts!

In November they travelled to Baltimore for the second event with Jonathan's family. This was held at the American Visionary Arts Museum alongside some amazing sculptures. During the evening Jonathan and Laura changed into traditional Nigerian clothes to celebrate with Jonathan's father and all of his Nigerian relatives.



This photo shows Laura attempting the traditional Nigerian wedding dance which was great fun.

Behind The Scenes – Play Readings

Firstly, a huge **THANK YOU** to the stars of the Play Reading Group: Barbara Blackwell and Mary Pritchard. Without this wonderful pair of ladies I don't know what we'd do! So many thanks to you both for ensuring that the evenings have run smoothly for many years.

This month **Mary Pritchard** has prepared an unusual 'Behind the Scenes'.

Mary writes: There's many a myth about the monthly play readings and, to test your knowledge, below are some statements on the subject. But which are true and which are false? **If you get one or more of the answers right, then you win a prize!** Yes! A fantastic opportunity to choose the play to read at a future evening*! Moreover you can also lead the evening AND choose the role you want to read!!

Don't miss out on this wonderful opportunity to win a fabulous prize!

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. The Play Reading evenings have been going on for many years | True/False |
| 2. Readings always take place on the first Wednesday of the month | True/False |
| 3. Barbara Blackwell and Mary Pritchard always host the Play Reading evenings | True/False |
| 4. You may only attend a Play Reading if Mary phones to invite you | True/False |
| 5. Only English mother-tongue people may attend | True/False |
| 6. Everyone who attends HAS to read | True/False |
| 7. People start arriving around 7.45pm and reading begins around 8pm | True/False |
| 8. Barbara and Mary always prepare delicious refreshments such as roast peacock, turbot stuffed with caviar and bombe a la surprise, washed down with vast quantities of La Veuve | True/False |
| 9. Would-be directors can get a chance to hear a play they'd like to direct read aloud, and get feed-back from the participants | True/False |
| 10. Play Readings are a fun, relaxed way of spending an evening | True/False |

Answers at the end of Ecco – to claim your prize contact Mary!

More details about forthcoming Play Readings on next page

* Actually – you don't even need to get an answer right to do this!



Monthly Play Readings

Wednesday 8 January

Janet Middleton will lead us in reading

THE MOUSETRAP by Agatha Christie

This wintery tale should be a good start to the 2014 play readings!

Please remember: There is a cloak of secrecy over this play – those who have seen it are sworn to never reveal Who Done It!

The Wikipedia article on *The Mousetrap* includes the following information: Christie was always upset by the plots of her works being revealed in reviews, and in 2010 her grandson Mathew Prichard, who receives the royalties from the play, was "dismayed" to learn from The Independent that the ending to *The Mousetrap* was revealed online in the play's Wikipedia article. And it is still there! So don't go to the website if you don't want to know the ending!

We will meet the following characters in this play:

- **Mollie Ralston** – Proprietor of Monkswell Manor, and wife of Giles.
- **Giles Ralston** – Husband of Mollie who runs Monkswell Manor with his wife.
- **Christopher Wren** – The first guest to arrive at the hotel, Wren is a hyperactive young man who acts in a very peculiar manner. He admits he is running away from something, but refuses to say what. Wren claims to have been named after the architect of the same name by his parents.
- **Mrs Boyle** – A critical older woman who is pleased by nothing she observes.
- **Major Metcalf** – Retired from the army, little is known about Major Metcalf.
- **Miss Casewell** – A strange, aloof, masculine woman who speaks offhandedly about the horrific experiences of her childhood.
- **Mr Paravicini** – A man of unknown provenance, who turns up claiming that his car has overturned in a snowdrift. He appears to be affecting a foreign accent and artificially aged with make-up.
- **Detective Sergeant Trotter** – He arrives in a snow storm and questions the proprietors and guests.

Next Play Reading: Wednesday 5 February

Please ring Mary to let her know if you are going to come along on 02 345 8583 (you are most likely to catch Mary between 8-10, am or pm), or email ecco@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com for further information.

We meet at 7.45 for an 8pm start!

Contributions of interval drinks or nibbles always welcome!



Other Forthcoming Productions

For more information and auditions see www.theatreinbrussels.com

American Theatre Company

Sylvia by A R Gurney

21 January – 1 February 2014

English Comedy Club

An Ideal Husband by Oscar Wilde

18-22 March 2014

Irish Theatre Group

Come Home, James Gurr by Patrick Maher

25-29 March 2014

BLOC

Sweeney Todd by Stephen Sondheim

15-18 May 2014

English Comedy Club

Miss Julie by August Strindberg

10-14 June 2014

Brussels Shakespeare Society

King Lear by William Shakespeare

24-28 June 2014

Click on the name of the theatre group above to go directly to their website

If you hear of any productions coming up in English in Brussels or Belgium, why not share with your ECC friends? Send details to Janet for inclusion in the next ECCO:

ecco@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com

FANTASTIC PLAY READING COMPETITION

The Answers!

1. The Play Reading evenings have been going on for many years

True: The Blackwells hosted the evenings in their home for many years, but not always on a monthly basis. There was then a pause, but they were revived when someone said 'Oh dear! I went to auditions but didn't get a part, so there's nothing happening on the acting side until auditions for the next production'. July 1996 saw the first 'revived' Play Reading.

2. Readings always take place on the first Wednesday of the month

True and False: If the ECC has a production on during the week containing the first Wednesday of the month, or if it's the 1st January (!) then the Play Reading will be postponed until the second Wednesday. Since July 1996 no month has been reading-less.

3. Barbara Blackwell and Mary Pritchard always host the Play Reading evenings

True: Although they would be delighted if someone else would volunteer as well!

4. You may only attend a Play Reading if Mary phones to invite you

False: You should phone Mary to let her know you are coming (it saves her phone bill). If she doesn't answer, let it ring for a long time and it will go on to the Belgacom messaging service and you can leave a message. Please do not send carrier pigeons!

5. Only English mother-tongue people may attend

False: Plays are always in English, but anyone is invited to read and we don't mind a bit if you read slowly or have difficulty in pronouncing some words (we all do!) And you will be surprised at how your 'performance' improves over the months.

6. Everyone who attends HAS to read

False: You can just sit and listen (although eventually you might find yourself persuaded)

7. People start arriving around 7.45pm and reading begins around 8pm

True: But parking is really difficult!

8. Barbara and Mary always prepare delicious refreshments such as roast peacock, turbot stuffed with caviar and bombe a la surprise, washed down with vast quantities of La Veuve

False! Everyone brings a little something towards the food and drink (eg a packet of crisps, bottle, biscuits ...) Everything is put on the table and you help yourselves.

True: Barbara always prepares some tasty little titbits. Mary doesn't: "Let them eat cake" she says (or was it someone else who said that?). No stigma is cast on people who turn up empty handed.

Anything left over is carried over until the next time if it will keep – or taken away by participants if it won't. The rumour that Mary and Barbara have a wild party with the remains is totally untrue!

9. Would-be directors can get a chance to hear a play they'd like to direct read aloud, and get feed-back from the participants

True: And it helps people who want to audition to have an idea about the characters in the play.

10. Play Readings are a fun, relaxed way of spending an evening

TRUE! The group keeps you in touch with other ECC 'Associates' and gives you a chance to play Romeo when you're really of Lear's generation! If you can't commit to attending regular rehearsals due to work, home or other duties, this is a good way to keep in touch. Plus, you don't have to learn any lines!!

How did you do?

Ring Mary NOW to claim your prize!!!